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MR. RUSKIN'S LECTURE—COLOR.

(From the *Athenæum*.)

THE lecturer began by saying, that he had come there that day to tell them that he could inform them nothing of color, but what they already knew. He meant, that they would know by means of that power, by which Falstaff knew when to run away—instinct. And they must remember that Falstaff, on the particular occasion to which he referred, could not have done a better thing than run away. Instinct taught the bee to make his cell hexagonal, obeying certain complicated arithmetic laws, of which he (the bee) could not possibly know anything. Put a fly to make such a cell, and he could not, and would not, do it; all he did would end as it begun in—buzz. What made the English fight at the Crimea? Not the wish to please their public or their country—but a certain instinct which they obeyed. The compassionate man who picked up a child that was likely to be run over, did not stoop down because he felt it was better or right for him to do so, but because he could not help it—he obeyed a momentary impulse. To color, is to obey an instinct. The modern philosopher tells you there are three primary colors—red, blue, and yellow—which, in certain proportions, mix together, and form white light; and he professes to inform you what complementary tints to use, and what exact relative quantity of each, to obtain harmony of color. He had been talking only lately with one of the most eminent modern inquirers into these optical laws, who told him that red and green was one of the most perfect harmonies that could be discovered, and the red and blue of Titian he pronounced utterly wrong. He (the lecturer) then asked him, if he had discovered any picture in the Academy, in which these laws were all attended to; and the philosopher replied, that he had been carefully through the Academy, and found one. It proved to be one of the greatest daubs in the collection. It was actually a fact, that, at that time, they possessed no scarlet that would stand; yet in this page of a missal, which he exhibited, five hundred years old, the scarlet was as brilliant and fresh as if just painted. These men then neglected the proper objects of their vocation, and laid down laws which were dangerous to follow. He exhibited a painting of some purple and yellow plums, by Mr. Hunt. He was sitting by the artist when he was painting them, and asked him why he used a certain color; and Mr. Hunt replied, he could not say, but he felt it would conduce to the effect. Mr. Mulready, one of the most delightful of modern colorists, was asked in what his secret of coloring lay, and he replied—"In feeling what color to use, and then using it." The same thing applied to music; and he would give them an instance from the life of Haydn, when a certain English nobleman begged him to give him lessons in composition; and pulling one of the composer's own quartettes out of his pocket, asked him the reason for the position of the first bar. To all his questions, Haydn only replied, that he had put such a note in such a place, because he felt it should be there; and he knew no other reason. When the nobleman began to discuss more elaborate subjects, he wished him good morning, saying—"I see, my lord, that you came to give me lessons, and not I you; and I am too much honored by such instruction." Great poets, too, never wrote by rule. A friend of Mr. Tennyson's, one of the greatest living masters of versification, took the trouble to collect illustrations of the elaborate laws by which the poet wrote, and to show them to him; but, to his astonishment, Mr. Tennyson was ignorant of them all. They all acted by instinct. Remembering the philosopher's dicta, that red and green are the most harmonious, take then an orange as one of

the most beautiful specimens of yellow, and ask the philosopher, with what color he would contrast it? He would answer, so many parts of blue. But what did Nature do? She took the deepest and richest green, and a speck of white flower here and there. Take the gentian again, with its deep blue flower, and how would he place it?—with red. But Nature placed it amid green grass and white lilies of the valley, with here and there a grey rock. It was these scientific proportions of color that drove the young artist frantic; and yet, by obeying these alone, he never would color. The bad colorist always had most exact rules to account for the dirtiest tint he used; but the great colorist only mixed and blended by feeling and instinct.

But he had not come there to tell them that, but would go on to discuss the properties of true color. In the first place, it must be graduated, passing through many delicate, varied, and imperceptible changes. The best color required to have about it, a certain transiency, almost sad; and color must be, as it were, dying, to be in perfection. They would see that in the beautiful specimens of Turner's that he handed round. Turner scarcely drew a speck with a camel's hair brush but he blended two tints. In the most gorgeous specimen of modern coloring, the Bridge of Coblenz, the blue was deep; but the foreground was full of burnt-sienna touches, imperceptibly mixed. In Mr. Hunt's plums, too, a slight touch of red, in a bruised part of one of the blue plums, brought in the third primary color, red, with the blue and the yellow. But in other pictures, Turner had used hardly anything but blue and yellow. They were lost if they attended to mere laws of color. Let them watch Nature, and make notes of her combinations as they observed them. If the scene was cold, they must naturally have a preponderance of cold color:—if it was warm, of hot. Another requisite for good color was, that it be subtle, and kept precious and delicate. A great colorist did not slop paint on, did not scrub his paper with sand, or splash it over, but put on each touch with as much care as if he had taken a day to measure it. As an instance of the importance of such care, he would mention that great masterpiece, "The Marriage of Cana," by Paul Veronese. So balanced was its color, that a single white hair in the paw of a cat, playing with a jar, in the left-hand corner, told in the picture. Feeling this delicacy of color, how was it possible that restorers could repaint whole pictures, and preserve their beauty? The same argument applied to the introduction of color in church restorations. He could not, he confessed, feel quite reconciled to mere unskillful painting of stone, and preferred other means of introducing color. Great colorists might, however, perhaps, succeed. The same applied even to the works of Egypt. The restorations of color were founded on a spot of blue dust, or a little corroded red; and the restorers forgot that success depended on the exact shade of blue or red out of many. Therefore, all such restoration must be poor and inadequate. Another element of pure color was surprise. The artist delighted to get you in a certain train of expectation, and then to break off with a graceful and unexpected tune:—to follow his own law to a certain distance, and then set up another. A missal painter would put four heads running in ovals, and then sweep an angel's wing or a leaf over the margin of the fifth. He wished to point out to them that, while all other colors were heavenly, deep green and pale ashy buff were peculiarly of earth—the one was the color of grass, the other of fresh-turned mould,—and these colors should be avoided in all spiritual or religious subjects. Nature had placed the opal in a buff-colored rock. Now it was an unfortunate fact, that although great things might be expected from the modern manufacture of colored tiles, which had been used in Bond street

as a rich external decoration, the ground-work chosen had been of a buff color. There had been much discussion about the color which the Greeks called purple,—some thought it scarlet, others, including himself, a deep, solemn crimson. He proved it thus:—Homer spoke of purple death—the wine-colored or purple sea,—and of blood on the white skin looking like ivory, stained purple by a Tyrian girl. Now the Greek ideal of blood was its blackness—by purple death, Homer meant dark death—and the epithet of the wine-colored sea, was an allusion to the appearance of the blue Mediterranean, when angry red storm-clouds are reflected from its surface. The Iliad, moreover, speaks of purple-faced oxen. Now oxen never had scarlet faces, but purple was the exact description of the sunset shining on the dark velvety hair of their foreheads. He would also notice a peculiarity of scarlet, that it was never seen in nature without being associated in most minds with an idea of blood. It was rarely seen at sunset without such associations, and the same in flowers. Thus the French had the *gouttes de sang*, and the English love-*lies-bleeding*. He might be reminded of the rose, one of the most beautiful of flowers; but here, as in a blush, that most exquisite of sights, there came in the thought of life to ennoble the color. Now in the cactus, which was so full of varieties of tint, from the palest crimson to violet and white, the scarlet did not appear. The Venetians were great users of a certain dull earthy red, which they used as a graduating tint. This color was frequently used by Massaccio and Ghirlandaio, at Florence. In one picture alone there were seventeen modifications of red. As an instance of the Venetian fondness for this color, he would show them a solemn head by Bonifazio, which having been half destroyed, and the house where it was, pulled down during the war, had been found by a pawnbroker, and sold to him for 15s. 6d.

The architecture of the present century gave them a great opportunity of tracing color in brick, which, when softened by time, grew very beautiful, however uncouth it might be in architectural form. It grew specked with blue, and full of changing purple. This variety was the life of color, and monotony its death. Every fold of the curtains around them was perpetually changing its color, and every knot in the rafters overhead abounded in shades of brown. They would find in illumination small specks of white on the blue ground, and the most subtle gradations of tone. He had enlarged a well-composed letter to show the characters of the curves, but it was impossible to unite the climax of color and subtle form,—and they must use simple forms for illuminating with pure color. They would find the religious color pure and bright, and the dull colors gross and mean. Fra Angelico was the highest instance of one, and Salvador Rosa, with his dark browns and greys, of the other. He had warned them of too much imitation of organic form in illuminations, as he had of too much nature, although he was rather fond of Nature himself. He would allude again to the peculiarly national gift, the power over the grotesque, that illuminating would give them. Of this Bunyan was the highest instance, and Albert Durer another. His "Death and the Knight" was a wonderful work. He could also mention two modern German engravings. In the one, Death breaks in upon a masquerade; in the other, Death surprises a sexton sitting at sunset in his chamber at the belfry. Death is about to ring at once his vesper and his passing bell, and, by a beautiful touch of tenderness, a bird is singing on the window-sill. They need not be afraid that illuminating would not pay; and they might be sure that by attending to Nature, and studying pure color and pure form, they would grow better and happier. He exhibited the work of some mere boys since he had last lectured, as a

proof of the beauty attainable by a little study. Somebody had said that he had understated the amount of time required to obtain perfection in "writing," as it was called. They had mistaken him. He had been astonished at the skill with which a mere workman would strike a true curve accurately and well,—but he wanted to see more than this mere nimbleness of fingers.

We shall republish, from time to time, a series of letters by William Page, which appeared in the *Broadway Journal* some years since, and which, from the standing of the author, and the originality of the views they contain, will, we believe, prove interesting to the public, though in many respects we believe Page himself would now differ from them.—EDS. CRAYON.

THE ART OF THE USE OF COLOR IN IMITATION IN PAINTING.

NO. I.

BY WILLIAM PAGE.

IMITATION I understand to be the means whereby in Art the effects of Nature are imitated, or reproduced, and the more nearly the means used correspond with, or are analogous to, those used by nature in the production of her effects, the nearer will be the impression made on the eye by such artistic result to that made by the real object in nature itself.

Sir Joshua Reynolds declares that Gerard Douw, with his high finishing, was a closer imitator of nature than Raphael. This is false, or, to say the least, calculated to mislead the understanding. In the imitation of the minutiae of the merely external portions of inanimate objects, he no doubt was, for this is what he saw most clearly before him. But to say that Raphael did not also find in nature what he wished to represent, viz.: beauty of form and exalted harmonious expressions, would be to my mind a palpable absurdity. These he saw in nature, and transferred to his works; and though the judgment of the world has left but little doubt which is to be preferred, it is still less doubtful that they equally proceeded on the principle of the "immediate imitation of nature," each expressing to the best of his abilities that of which he had the clearest perception, as did Titian and Correggio in color and chiaro-scuro, they having a keener relish for these qualities, than for expression or form.

Then, who will pretend to say, that Raphael would not have been exalted to a higher pitch of excellence, by the addition of the minute exactness of Gerard Douw, the color of Titian, or the clear-obscure of Correggio, if these could have been superadded to his own, if you will, higher possessions, without displacing any of his already attained excellences. And that such a thing might be, needs only eyes to see, that in Nature herself all this, and more, is accomplished; there, the minuteness that puts Douw's best efforts to shame, and causes Titian's color to pale at the comparison, and the light and dark of Correggio to look heavy and dull, lie side by side with a diviner exaltation of expression than ever Raphael could dream, and add to its force and truth. In sculpture we have an illustration. The busts of our countryman, Hiram Powers, which have all the breadth of the finest antique heads, and a minuteness of finish in all the details, unknown to that gifted people, the Greeks, and still more so to modern nations, without disturbing either breadth of form or expression, shall yet make the world wonder that such things should have been done in our midst, and never a cry of a miracle, a miracle!

It may here be well to a clearer understanding of the subject, to observe, that in sculpture the means used are fully adequate to the end to be produced—being, with a perfectly pliant substance, wet clay, to imitate or reproduce the form of any natural object, giving only one

body for a like form of body in another substance: which will at once show the wide difference between these two imitative Arts, when we consider that in painting the flat substance must appear rotund, or otherwise the form of the thing to be imitated, where the form is not, but only the appearance; to say nothing of the light, dark, and color, necessary to give those other innumerable qualities demanded in a picture. And this brings us to the means used in the latter Art, to convey impressions as of natural objects, more particularly color. Now, there are but three primitive colors used by the Creator to adorn and beautify this all-beautiful world of his creation, viz., red, yellow and blue. Yet, these three,—to which all tints, hues, and variations are to be traced, together with light and dark, so imperfectly represented in painting by white and black, are all the feeble means we have, with our own short sight, to compete with that infinite variety of Nature which has been the love and admiration of all mankind from the beginning. It will then seem evident, that economy with these slender means must be of the last importance; and that he who uses these most ingeniously, and with the least outlay of them, so that he produces the desired effect, and has most power in reserve, will be the truest artist.

If white and black are the extreme limits of our scope with which we must represent, if at all, that infinite stretch in nature between her intensest ray of light, and that outer darkness where no light is—for often as we have used our utmost skill to make the surface of our canvas, or the plane on which we produce our pictures, as dark as pigments will make it, it will cast a shadow in noon-day darker than itself; and so when our brilliant white has been exhausted in imitating light, a little diamond would blaze upon its surface. This being so, may well teach us how limited is our power to cope with the Infinite, and, that humility and the following humbly, afar off, in Art, as in religion, the Almighty leading, makes us most like what we would most wish to be. Now, to bring these indefinite extremes of Nature within our own range of mental vision, let us suppose them divided into five degrees, equally removed from each other, the first being light, and the last perfect darkness; but, though this simple division will answer our purpose for illustration in writing, the artist must make an almost infinite subdivision in his practice. Then suppose, in like manner, the painter's representatives of light and darkness so divided into a like number of degrees, that the medium or third degree in the scale is equally removed from each extreme in either case, will not this give us the nearest approach that we can get in Art, to the medium or third degree in Nature in the scale which we have indicated above? If so, let us fix this in our minds as the centre whence all analysis begins. We shall hereafter have occasion to refer to this more particularly.

The painting of human flesh has always been considered the best test of the powers of a colorist; and the human face may well be considered as the highest test, as the well-known focus (so to speak) of expression. Goethe has well said in his "Theory of Colors," that here nature seems to have exhausted all her resources, having so used all the primitive colors, and so interwoven and combined them, that we scarce know which predominate (I quote from memory)—and he might have added, that all other known qualities, too, present themselves to our eyes here, or rather evade our search and strive to hide themselves from our observation, as any painter who has tried to represent them, well knows. Although one of these above-named primitive colors—blue, has been found to exist in nature, in the case of the blue sky, as the product of light over dark (that is, the darkness of space beyond, seen by us through the light of the atmosphere of earth, producing, as darkness

seen through light always does, the blueness); and has, on this account, been rejected by some as a primitive color; yet, as it cannot be resolved back again to the other two primitives, or be produced by any known combination of these, we must occupy it. I should wish to call this color of the sky an accidental color, in contradistinction to the local color of the violet, or any other blue thing where the color cannot be separated from the substance, but is always a part of it. Now it will be clearly seen, that if we had the pigments capable of representing perfect light and perfect dark, we should very readily produce a complete resemblance to this color of the sky, by making a ground of perfect darkness, and when this was dry, so as not to mix these extremes, or the pigments representing them, passing over it a layer of perfect light, so as to allow that dark to appear through, as in the reality.

(To be Continued.)

LONDON ARCHITECTURE.—The outside of the common brick houses of London is very plain, and has nothing agreeable in the architecture, unless it be the neat and well-defined joints of the brick-work. On the other hand, many of the great palace-like buildings are furnished with architectural decorations of all kinds—with pillars, pilasters, &c. There are, however, two reasons why most of them have rather a disagreeable effect. In the first place, they are destitute of continuous, simple main lines, which are indispensable in grand architectural effects, and to which even the richest decoration must be strictly subordinate. Secondly, the decorative fixtures are introduced in a manner entirely arbitrary, without any regard to their original meaning, or to the destination of the edifice.

This absurdity is carried to the greatest excess in the use of columns; these, originally supporting members, which, placed in rows in the buildings of the ancients, produce the combined effect of a pierced wall, bearing one side of a space beyond, are here ranged in numberless instances, as wholly unprofitable servants, directly before a wall. This censure applies in an especial manner to most of the works of the lately deceased architect, Nash. In truth, he has a peculiar knack of depriving masses of considerable dimension, of all effect, by breaking them into a number of little projecting and receding parts; while, in the use of the most diverse forms and ornaments, he is so arbitrary, that many of his buildings—for instance, the new palace of Buckingham House—looks as if some wicked magician had suddenly transformed some capricious stage scenery into solid reality.—*Dr. Waagen.*

COLUMN MONUMENTS.—What shall we say to the fact, that the English, who first made the rest of Europe acquainted with the immortal models of the noblest and chastest taste in architecture and sculpture of ancient Greece, when it was resolved, a few years ago, to erect a monument to the Duke of York, produced nothing but a bad imitation of Trajan's Pillar!

This kind of monument first came into use among the Romans, a people who, in respect to the gift of invention in the Arts, and in matters of taste, always appear, in comparison with the Greeks, as semi-barbarian. The very idea of isolating the column proves that the original destination, as the supporting member of a building, was wholly lost sight of. Besides this, the statue placed on it, though as colossal as the size of the base will allow, necessarily appears little and puppet-like, compared with the column; while the features and expression of the countenance, which are the most important indications of intellectual character in the person commemorated, are wholly lost to the spectator.—*Dr. Waagen.*